

The Direct-Method: A Good Start to Teach Oral Language

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Abstract

Oral language development has always played a big role in foreign language learning process. Oral proficiency is considered as the major goal of foreign language learning. The use of communication strategies highly contributes to oral proficiency in the target language. This study focuses on developing students' communicative abilities through using the target language constantly in the classroom. And this study emphasizes the benefits of the Direct Method to teach how to communicate in the target language.

Key Words: The Direct Method, Communication, Target Language, Speech

Introduction

There is a widespread assumption that language is best learnt when students actively use it in the classroom. The Direct Method, which is also known as natural method or conversational method, has been popular since it enables students to communicate in the foreign language. The Direct Method through focusing on everyday language, and using questions and answers lays an emphasis on teaching oral language. The primary objective of this method is associate meaning and the target language directly through the use of realia, pictures or pantomime (Larsen-Freeman, 1986, p.29).

Rivers summarizes the characteristics of the Direct Method as "students learn to understand a language by listening to a great deal of it and that they learn to speak it by speaking it- associating speech with appropriate action" (Rivers, 1968, s.18).

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Proponents of the Direct Method are of the opinion that "language consists - except for lexicographers - not of words, but of sentences" (Vietor 1882, s.4) which will enable the students to learn speech earlier. In the Direct Method language is learnt for communication, as Larsen-Freeman (2000) states language is primarily speech. Classroom instruction and classroom activities are carried out in the target language; therefore, students are actively involved in using the target language. Conversational activities hold an important place in this method. Through using language in real contexts, students stand a better chance of thinking, and speaking in the target language. Similarly, Stern points out that the Direct Method is

characterized by the use of the target language as a means of instruction and communication in the language classroom, and by the avoidance of the use of the first language and of translation as a technique (Stern, 1983).

The Direct Method will enable students to understand the language which will help them to use the language with ease; moreover, as L1 is not allowed students learn the language through demonstration and conversation which will lead them to acquire fluency.

The Direct Method has been useful in that it “provided an exciting and interesting way of learning the foreign language through activity. It proved to be successful in releasing students from the inhibitions all too often associated with speaking a foreign tongue, particularly at the early stages.” (Rivers, 1968, s.20)

Similarly, Richardson through explaining the learning process in the Direct Method stresses the role of teachers as “they all insisted on the primacy of phonetics as a basis for language teaching; on the importance of oral practice and the necessity for making the reader the centre of instruction; on the principle of direct association between the thing referred to and the new word in the foreign language; on the teaching of grammar by inductive methods, and of the avoidance of the written or printed word until the pupil's pronunciation was so sound that it would not be influenced by seeing how the words were spelt,” (1983, s.38)

The Direct Method received strong criticism in that it required teachers speak with a native-like fluency (Richards and Rodgers, 2007). Because the success of this method depends on the competence of the teachers, students will not have a good opportunity to develop their language skills unless this native-like proficiency is obtained by the teachers. As the professors of the Pennsylvania State University state “a successful teacher of the Direct Method needs competence in his language, stamina, energy, imagination, ability and time to create own materials and courses, immense vitality, robust health, real fluency in the modern language he teaches. He must be resourceful in the way of gesture and tricks of facial expression, be proof against linguistic fatigue in the language teaching day and be able to sketch rapidly on the board.” (Ducháčková, 2006).

However, taking the students' comprehension capacity into consideration, as long as the classroom instruction is conducted in the target language students will benefit a lot from the use of this method. Though this method was criticized for not teaching listening strategies systematically, there is no question that students' listening development relies on listening to the target language continuously. Students who listen to the target language constantly tend to develop their listening skills.

Conclusion:

Teachers should value students' talk. Acquisition of a good oral proficiency is of paramount importance in foreign language learning process. Creating a communicative environment encourages students to get engaged in the target language, and enhances their oral language development. The teacher should be aware of his/her potential in the Direct Method as it will positively influence language development of students.

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